

VZCZCXRO7999
OO RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV
DE RUEHC #2535/01 0882340
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O P 282335Z MAR 08
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO RUEHSK/AMEMBASSY MINSK IMMEDIATE 0875
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMCSUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 8821
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 0102
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEATRS/TREASURY DEPT WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 9358
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 3205

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 032535

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AMGT](#) [KHUM](#) [ODIP](#) [OFDP](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: BELARUS: RESPONSE TO MINSK GUIDANCE REQUEST

REF: MINSK 215

Classified By: ACTING A/S KURT VOLKER
FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST. In response to Reftel, the Department has determined that a five-person embassy is not tenable in the hostile environment of Belarus. Embassy Minsk would need to be closed entirely if Belarus forces the issue and requires us to operate with five American staff. Embassy Minsk should continue ongoing preparations with all deliberate speed and in coordination with the Department for likely closure of the Embassy. If the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as expected, demands on March 31 that Embassy Minsk voluntarily reduce the number of American staff from 17 to 5, Charge is instructed not to respond directly to such a request, but to protest in the strongest possible terms that there will be negative consequences. Charge is also instructed to tell the MFA that such a demand will be immediately referred to the Department for further guidance. See paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 for additional guidance. END SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUEST.

¶2. (S) The Department is currently taking steps to prepare for the likelihood that Belarus will expel additional American diplomats and that Embassy Minsk will be forced to close. The Department understands that the Belarus diplomatic and media assault on Embassy Minsk, including American and foreign staff, has created an environment of uncertainty. We are making every effort to ensure that if necessary, the closure of Embassy Minsk can be accomplished quickly, safely, and effectively.

Objectives

¶3. (S) Embassy Minsk is requested to pursue the following objectives with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the event the MFA demands a reduction in U.S. staff.

-- Object in the strongest terms to Belarus requesting a reduction to 5 American staff immediately after requesting a reduction to 17 American staff.

-- Express U.S. outrage at the diplomatic and media assault on our embassy, our locally employed staff, our American staff, and the clear decision to continue to ignore fundamental freedoms and human rights.

-- Warn the Belarusians of the consequences of their actions. These would likely include additional financial

sanctions, which could happen very soon after such an action has been taken against us. Their actions have also spurred internal discussions about how we could justify extending the Jackson-Vanik waiver in June, and how we could justify supporting Belarus's WTO accession talks.

-- Inform the MFA that we will refer the issue to the Department for further guidance, without signaling any acceptance of the Belarusian demand.

Additional Guidance

¶4. (S) In response to reftel request for guidance on timing for suspension for classified operations, the Bureau of Diplomatic Security is working out a schedule directly with Embassy Minsk.

¶5. (SBU) In response to reftel request for authorization for HHE packout for all American employees, packout as necessary is authorized. Charge the following fund cite for all packout costs:

Appropriation: 19 X05220000
Allotment: 1007
Obligation: 808009
Op Allow: 100708
Object: 9100

Maintain separate itemization of costs per family unit for

STATE 00032535 002 OF 002

reporting to RM/CFO.

¶6. (U) Point of Contact in the Office of Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus Affairs is Stephen Gee, Desk Officer for Belarus, 202-736-4443, or GEESJ@STATE.SGOV.GOV. Administrative point of contact in EUR-IO/EX is Pri Sen, Post Management Officer, 202-736-7513 or SENPX@STATE.GOV .
RICE